"TRUTH IS ONE, MEN CALL IT BY VARIOUS NAMES."
—RIG VEDA

VEDANTA QUARTERLY

Message of the East

FALL 1960

LIFT YOUR THOUGHT

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VOLUME XLIX NUMBER 3

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Message of the East

"And behold the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the East."
—*Ezekiel*

"Light shall come again from the East."
—*Tyndall*

VOLUME XLIX 1960 NUMBER 3

GOD IS OUR GOAL

by Sri Sri Sarada Devi

The more intensely a person practices spiritual disciplines, the more quickly he attains to God. Open your heart to Him. Shed tears and pray sincerely, "O Lord, draw me toward You; give me peace of mind." He who has really prayed to God even once has nothing to fear. By praying to Him constantly one gets ecstatic love, through His grace. This love, my child, is the innermost thing of spiritual life.

The goal of life is to realize God and to be always immersed in the thought of Him. God is one's very own. It is an eternal relationship. One realizes Him in proportion to the intensity of one's feeling for Him. Love of God is the essential thing.

Even if you feel no attraction for the Lord now, you will become drawn to Him just by repeating His name. As the wind removes the cloud, so the name of God destroys the cloud of wordliness that overcasts the mind. The natural tendency of the mind is to run this way and that. Repeating the divine name is calculated to direct the mind to God.

Nothing can be achieved without purity of mind. One must practice spiritual disciplines. As one gets the fragrance of a flower by handling it, or the smell of sandalwood by rubbing it against a stone, so one gets spiritual awakening by constantly thinking of God. When death will come is uncertain; so one should carry out pious intentions whenever the opportunity presents itself, without waiting for a particular time.

One should practice meditation and repetition of God's name at regular times, overcoming idleness. Repetition must be accompanied by concentration. You might repeat His name the whole day long, but if the mind is elsewhere no result will be produced. Spiritual practice means to keep the mind steady at His lotus feet and to be absorbed in the thought of Him.

Do not relax your practice simply because you do not get the vision of God immediately. Does an angler catch a big carp the moment he sits down with the rod? He has to wait and wait, and many a day he is disappointed. He who is really anxious to cross the ocean of the world will somehow break his bonds. No one can entangle him. Even the injunctions of destiny will be cancelled if one takes refuge in God. As a result of sincere and regular practice, you will find that the Lord will speak to you. All your desires will be fulfilled and you will experience pure bliss.

In the fullness of one's spiritual realization one finds that He who resides in one's heart resides in the hearts of others as well. . . . This realization makes one truly humble.

LIFT YOUR THOUGHT

by Swami Paramananda

In the study of Vedic philosophy great emphasis is laid upon the ordering of the mind. Man is an aggregate of many qualities, both physical and mental but he has no medium as vital as the faculty of thought. It is never through action alone that we achieve success in life, but by the directing of this action through right thinking. We may read and study, become acquainted with the sciences, know all the rules of life, but if we have not assimilated the essence, this knowledge profits us little. All our labor becomes unproductive unless it is sustained by noble and pure thoughts. As a man "thinketh in his heart so is he" is absolutely true. This does not come merely from the Christian Bible; it is the law, the great theme of life. As we think so we become. Even our external being is formed by the thoughts we hold in our mind.

Why is it then that we who believe and know this to be true are not all transformed? Why would we deliberately hold any detrimental thought or encourage anything that may drag us down to a lower plane? The difficulty is this. We may intellectually and theoretically know the kind of thoughts we ought to think, but it is totally different when we come to apply them. Often times some provocation or an unpleasant incident will completely absorb our interest. Why? It is not because anyone thrusts this upon us. We have the right to drop our kind of thinking. No outside

influence can really bind us by force. We simply cling to these things. However, if we commence by making the effort to elevate our thoughts, believing that we are truly children of God, and that we must be pure and free because we have descended from a pure origin, then try to follow up by acting according to our precepts, we will find that we have mastered the secret of a successful life, physical, mental and spiritual.

One of our great Indian sages put it in a simple form by saying that if we make our mind and mouth one we have solved the whole problem of existence. That is, our outer actions and our inner thoughts must be in accord; let there be no discordant note, no inharmony. One can easily see that real strength lies in inner harmony. We cannot convince anyone by our words or even by a smile unless we have the feeling within, unless we have real love in our hearts. All the words we could utter would not convince anyone. Therefore the whole foundation of life rests upon how we direct our thoughts.

There is a systematic process by which we can achieve this. At first it is an effort for us to hold our mind on a higher plane of thinking because it seems alien. But we can break the old habits and make new ones and thus be liberated. The one great detriment is the negative attitude we take, for we have learned through association and through our constant contact with the physical world to regard certain things as impossible. But as we enter within our own being and get hold of our inner resources we begin to doubt that certain

conditions are inevitable and insurmountable. And as we learn how to overcome them we need less and less help from outside, for we are able to help ourselves.

At first it is an arduous task to redirect our thinking into the right channel because our mind has become like a spoiled child; it wants to follow the path of least resistance. There are certain ruts we have created by our physical and mental habits and it is so much easier to pursue these than to create something new. When we continue to follow these old ruts, however, they become only deeper and more well-defined. If they are not the right kind, the undoing of them means that we must work very hard. Therefore it is good to reflect before starting anything.

In India even in the primary school the educational system is based on a well-ordered mind. It is considered insufficient merely to fill the brains of pupils with theories and ideas. They should also be given the hypothesis of right thinking; then they will be able to work out the principles for themselves. This is a very vital factor pertaining to all of life. We are spiritual children. We may have read many books and bibles, and we think just because we can recite some passages that we know them. But knowledge is not altogether dependent upon what we have mastered through our mind and intellect. It is more a matter of assimilation, and that comes as a result of continued reflection and results cannot be had without concentration.

Our power of thinking can be increased or

decreased. One person may not be able to hold his mind steadily to any one subject, while another can hold it so constantly that he becomes absolutely unconscious of anything external. By analyzing these two types of minds we can readily find out which is the more powerful. The one which has the ability to concentrate and is not thwarted by the small disturbances of the material universe is the one that is firmly established. If we are able to focus unwaveringly on any subject, knowledge is revealed to us. Consciously or unconsciously our bodies and minds are constantly being changed and according to the thoughts we are holding all our forces are taking form. Often people who are very devoted to each other even take on each other's likeness. And the same can happen through hatred. If we dwell on the shortcomings of another these too begin to become a part of ourselves. This is because we are saturating our minds with undesirable qualities instead of filling them with noble ones.

There is the story of the ascetic who came upon a woman who was degraded and fallen. He tried to uplift her by giving her certain rules to follow for a holy life. She tried hard to live up to them but sometimes because of her past habits she slipped, although her mind was always set on how she might elevate herself. While the ascetic sat down in apparent contemplation, his gaze was always fixed on what the woman was doing. Every time she made a mistake he kept a record of it. His whole thought was absorbed in her activities.

According to the story both of them died at the same time. A messenger from heaven came and took the woman away, while a messenger from hell came to the ascetic who said to him, "You are mistaken. She is the sinful character and I am the holy man." "Not at all," said the messenger, "your holiness has vanished because you have dwelt upon evil. That woman is purified because although physically she has done wrong, her heart and mind and motive have remained constantly focussed on spiritual things."

This should be a great warning to us. If we think we are better than others, criticize and condemn, sit down and judge the whole world, we are deprived of our merits no matter what we have done or been in the past.

Right thinking is the most potent factor in our life. It is not merely when we are sitting in prayer that we should lift our thoughts but we must do so always because it enhances our life and adds much to our experience. In fact it molds our whole being. No one is safe to step into the world of duty and activity without first guarding himself with pure spiritual aspiration. When we have this foundation of right thinking and right living, whatever we do becomes effective. Instead of rushing in to accomplish a task we should first order our mind and gain a degree of tranquility. With this background, success is absolutely guaranteed. We must all take time for quiet before action. We say that we do not have it, but that is not true. We have time for all our physical activities — eating, drinking and doing whatever

we like to do. Why can we not follow the same course in our spiritual life? At first we make the effort, then after awhile it becomes a natural habit.

It is very easy for us when we have committed a blunder to settle down and think that we are helpless. But as we learn to remind ourselves that we are the direct descendants of the Infinite, it awakens in us a new hope and a new courage. We come to know that we have within us that invincible Something, and that all we need is to strengthen and order our thinking.

We can help neither ourselves nor others by imposing on them fear of perdition and sin. It is only by the unfolding of our own inner strength, the awakening of the divine within us, that we are going to be strengthened. Religion in the highest sense does not reach us through fear of punishment but because of man's inherent love of Truth and his desire for knowledge. When that becomes the passion of our soul and begins to absorb all our thoughts and feelings, then we unconsciously become elevated, and it transforms our whole life. Whenever our mind is focussed on the ordinary — on sorrowful, degrading and imperfect things — we absorb their qualities. We have all experienced this. We may arise one morning, hear some sad news and have a chill thrown upon our whole day, even though the world outside is shining in the sun. Or we may learn of something that inspires us and immediately it brings a wonderful glow into our hearts. With the feeling of happiness we can surmount any obstacle that may come our way.

It is not by acquiring material possessions or power that we find permanent happiness and peace. By elevating our minds and governing all our propensities we are able to lift ourselves to a plane where we are free and can at the same time bring freedom to others. Whenever we are filled with noble thoughts we create a lofty atmosphere; other people feel it. One can even be healed and restored by living with someone who has an exalted mind. Also by entertaining bitter, hateful thoughts we can make others with whom we are in close contact ill. Such happenings are really true. Even physicians are finding this out. They recognize the fact that in a moment of anger a person can poison his whole physical system and create illness.

These things do not happen by chance however. We accumulate certain forces, they pile up to a point, then explode. Forces of opposite nature can bring about results which eliminate evils from our life. It is told of St. Francis of Assisi how he began to resemble Christ in his physical being and how his disciples saw the mark of stigmata on his hands just as it was believed to have been on the hands of Christ. This is perfectly natural and quite in accordance with the law.

We must be very selective in choosing the object on which we focus our thoughts. Instead of finding fault with the world or our environment we must try to discover the cause within ourselves. If we are miserable it is because our mind has attached itself to misery. If we want to make ourselves happy we must direct our powers through worthy

channels and must regulate our thinking every hour of the day. Not that we must never think of lesser things, but what we should do is to carry our ideal with us; then we will discover that all our actions are leading us toward the higher goal. In this way our whole life will be changed.

Concentration has tremendous power. All of us have this and can use it for either good or evil. When our thoughts flow through purer channels, toward a holy and spiritual objective we partake of the qualities of that upon which we concentrate. We become transformed; even our physical being changes. But we cannot acquire this accidentally. We have to work for it. The first seed we plant is the thought in our mind. It requires constant care and vigilance, like a garden that must be weeded, watered and watched over so that the seed we have planted will be able to thrive and grow.

Through our zeal and personal endeavors we can move one way or another. The same mind that holds unworthy contents is capable of keeping holy substance. We all have minds, and minds have infinite possibilities. When spirituality becomes our chief and vital attraction we are no longer satisfied with mere doctrine or theory. We become imbued with the ideal and long to live it; we want to make it a part of our life. This is the real vision. Religion becomes a living thing for us and we carry it with us wherever we go. And because we have it we find it everywhere.

We cannot expect the world to move in such a way to make our path full of ease and comfort. If we do we will be disappointed. Even when

things run smoothly for awhile it is only temporary. All is transitory and changing. But by learning to find our spiritual center within we remain well established. It does not matter then what befalls us. In our sorrow or suffering, in our elation or happiness, in good fortune or ill we possess that which nothing can disturb.

It is not selfish to seek the spiritual, for when we have acquired it we are able to share and give it to others. We have become like the cooling shade of a tree under which weary travelers stop to rest. Our very atmosphere will carry something soothing and real. Let us remember that it is not by spreading big ideas abroad that we will uplift humanity, but by the silent, potent, vital thoughts which will fill and saturate our life that we will help and bring peace to the world which needs it above all else.

KINSHIP OF IDEALS

They say: "Since men think that by the knowledge of Brahman they become all, what, pray, was it that Brahman knew by which It became all?" —*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*

He who possesses the mirror of Truth is free from fear; he will find comfort in the tribulations of life, and his life will be a blessing to all his fellow creatures. —*Gautama Buddha*

. . . 'Tis the Sublime of man,
Our noontide majesty, to know ourselves
Parts and proportions of one wondrous whole!
This fraternizes man, this constitutes
Our charities and bearings. But 'tis God
Diffused through all, that doth make all one whole.
—*Samuel Taylor Coleridge*

THE MIRACLE MAKER

by Sister Daya

This afternoon I feel as if I must sink my thought deep, deep into my own being in order to bring to you the livingness and tremendous significance of faith. There has been so much talk about it through the years that sometimes we are apt to lose the vital meaning behind the word. It is like a nerve that has been beaten upon until it grows numb; or like a new idea that we at first take hold of with enthusiasm, then little by little, as we hear more about it, our sensibility becomes dull.

So it is with many of the beautiful and wonderful assets of life — the qualities of the human mind, the possibilities of the human spirit — that have been revealed to us by the great sages and teachers. Children find stories of them in their copybooks, religions present them, and we ourselves repeat them over and over. After a time we forget that in these statements, simple though they often are, something has been given into our keeping that is of inestimable power, and that the keynote behind them all is faith.

There is not a single religion in the world that does not place faith as basic; everything else follows after. Without it no thing is possible in a spiritual way. Even in this material world, how could we survive, how could we live in comfort or with any sense of security if we did not have faith — faith in ourselves, in our fellow man and in the rhythmic ordering of life? Perhaps the

trouble is that we have too much faith in the purely outer, fleeting things of life — in our banks, our man-made laws, our outer defences and in the particular setup of our own individual lives. We have nice little walls built up around us and we think that here we can be secure. That is sufficient for a great many people until the walls break, until the defences crumble; or maybe until someone we have leaned upon forsakes us or goes down in death and suddenly the world is without him. Nowhere can we find him; nowhere can we see him; nowhere can we hear his voice. It is then that the great need of faith arises. And for the first time perhaps we turn to that mysterious inward kingdom unseen by the eye, untouched by the hand, even ungrasped by the mind, that kingdom which *must* be there or this world of beauty and significance, of nature and of man could not exist for one single moment.

Sri Ramakrishna speaks of faith in his great Gospel. He says that in a moment, through faith, even the blackest of sins can be washed away, that we can do without almost every other thing but we must have faith. These are the words of a man of tremendous realization, a human being who lived more in the presence of the Divine than the human.

Through lack of faith we worry about everything — about ourselves, about others, about outer conditions that seem to be going wrong. For instance, we may see someone we love taking a path that appears to us to be a mistake. Do we ever stop to consider how narrow our view might be,

what a small distance we can see and how little we know of the great issues of life? That soul probably has to go through the experience whatever it is, has to learn that lesson in order to clarify his nature and to build more soundly for the future. We cannot always interfere; we cannot always so protect those we love that never a chilling wind will blow, never an untoward event will hurt. Even if we could, would we want to wrap up our darlings in cotton wool so that they would turn out to be something without spine, without initiative, without understanding and without compassion? What makes a saint able to stoop right down to the dust and understand the person who is all but lost? It is because at some time, somewhere he has lived through the great experiences of life, through success, failure, despair, and through all these things has come out with a universal heart and a universal consciousness. Would we not rather have this gain for those we love even though it is in the future, than merely to coddle and shield them? Not that we must never try to give them our protection in every way, but when unavoidable things happen we should not just lie down and tear ourselves to pieces over it.

Often I have heard people discussing the problems of life. I have seen them fearful that they are going to be utterly annihilated after death, and have wondered at myself that it troubles me not at all. This always reminds me of the beautiful words of Emerson. Refering to Christ, he says, "Never did that sublime Spirit

speak in the patois of finite conjecture." When we begin to calculate, "Are we going to live after the act of death or do we cease to be?" we are dealing in time, past and present. But the human spirit is beyond time; it is an eternal thing. Emerson tried to tell us that Christ always spoke in terms of immortality, as when he stated: "Before Abraham was I am." That was certainly an eternal statement. And it is true not only of Christ but of you and me and everyone.

If we can base our life on some such absolute foundation, when we know that we are without beginning and without end, we can feel reality to the very tips of our fingers, we become vibrant, we become vitally alive. This is the God in us, this is endlessness; and this is what we must have if we are ever to advance in spiritual comprehension and in our dealings with the world which often assails us with doubt, darkness and despair. Man must carry in his heart a light so brilliant that it shines out and dispels not only his own darkness but all the shadows that at times gather round and make us draw back in fear.

If only we could live according to absolute faith, faith in a God that is the heart and life and center of our very being and without Whom there would be nothing at all! It is because that Godhead exists at every moment of time that this expression which is you or I is here, that you are here at this moment to listen, that I am here at this moment to speak. Not a leaf can stir, not a wind can blow, not a particle of dust can be moved; no bird could flutter in the treetop, no

lizard could sun itself on the warm stone without the divine Will. Every one of these has behind it the ocean of infinitude, the reality of God, or it would not be for one single moment. Think of the vision that such assurance can bring, how it can reach into the very depths of our life, fortify us, enrich us, stabilize us, give us poise, power and joy!

I often wonder what it would mean to possess that kind of living faith, a faith so burning and luminous that though we walk in darkness it would be like a light before our feet, and we could say, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil." We all like to repeat these words, but think what it would mean if we could really live them, if we could say, "God is in me, He is with me; I may be the lowest of low, I may have offended against God and man, but He never deserts me. He could not, because if He should withdraw I would vanish from the face of the earth. The mark and sign and symbol of His presence is my living being and therefore all I have to do is to recognize that, and with all my soul and all my heart cling to that One who is my life and my sustenance."

By holding such thoughts and feelings we would be building for eternity. God has a bigger vision for us than we have for ourselves and if we put our trust in that Power we will be able to expand the fabric of our spirit into universal dimensions. There is a feeling deep, deep down, a flame, a torch that we can all carry. We come to think of ourselves as weak, futile human beings; perhaps

we are old, perhaps we feel physically incapable of facing life. But many times people who have been ancient in years have risen up like a phoenix out of the ashes of their spent physical powers and have blazed with the glory of absolute faith. Nothing is impossible to us if we have that faith.

You will probably say, "But things do go wrong. Our lives are menaced; we go through terrible suffering; those we love go through suffering. We face defeat; we face death; we face so unhappy conditions." This brings to my mind what Swami Paramananda so frequently said, "If you have genuine faith you will not worry over anything." Now that seems like a big order. Of course it is far beyond us, and our little mind steps in and tries to convince us how absurd this is, that of course man has to worry and concern himself with these matters. He must get out and manipulate and handle things or everything in the universe will go wrong. But perhaps if man had not manipulated quite so much, things in the universe would go along much better. It is all our scheming and fighting and planning and calculating that is wrecking the world today. If men all over could have a living faith in the God within and acknowledge day by day, hour by hour that "I am That;" that "because That thinks, I think; because That moves, I move", if this could become a burning flame of realization, conditions would not be as they are today. It is true that things do not always go right. We break laws many, many times, not necessarily man-made laws but spiritual laws. We go against them constantly. "Love

worketh no ill to his neighbor: love therefore is the fulfillment of the law." Have we never offended against the law of love, against the law of compassion, against many of the innate higher principles? I think there is no one who could honestly say, "No, I have never offended against them." But if we have there must be the repercussion; nature has to regain her balance in us; we have to learn.

We must agree that it would not be good for us to put our hand in the fire and say, "Abracadabra, I am not burned." It is better that we learn the lesson so that we are prepared not to repeat the act. If only we could apply this to other things in life we would realize that we cannot work ill to our neighbor without working ill to ourselves. It may not return to us at the moment, it may come in a wide arc or a narrow arc, but come it will, like a boomerang, to the one who sent it forth. We will go through dark times to be sure, perhaps times of seeming utter defeat; but actually it is not defeat unless it destroys the faith in our hearts. There are more important issues than mere little human successes and failures, there are even greater considerations than whether we live or die. What is gained by faith may not be known now or at any immediate future, but someday we will realize that the seed we have sown in our hearts, nurtured and watched over, cultivated and protected, has grown into something so mighty that our whole life partakes of it; it has become like a great sheltering tree under which we gain absolute protection.

Not only must we have faith in God and faith in ourselves, but we must also have faith in our fellow man, even in the face of discouragement, for he, too, like ourselves, is an expression of Godhead. If we truly have faith in him, he will respond to that faith because the God in him will respond. If we start to become cynical and sceptical of everyone, people will react to us in just that spirit. We will find out all their faults and see all their defects as we go deeper and deeper into the mire of condemnation and doubt. But if we see through the pettiness, egotism and selfishness of others and realize that back of it all the Divine is working, we will find It responding to us at every turn, sometimes most beautifully, sometimes unexpectedly like a delicate flower that we may suddenly come across growing out of some dry pavement in a big city or out of the crevice of a huge rock. Because we are looking for beauty in these men it is there to fill our hearts with awe. We draw out what we are expecting from others and in order to receive the best from them we must have faith.

This same law applies in regard to ourselves. We must believe in ourselves, in the God in our own soul. When we reach the point where we cannot see anything but our own failures and limitations it is time to realize that there is One who can make the most impossible things possible. When Swami Vivekananda stood on the platform at the World Congress of Religions he felt very much alone. But he possessed a deep-rooted faith in himself and in the teachings he had come to

represent, so when he was called upon to speak he uttered a little prayer: "I take refuge in that One through whose grace the lame can cross the mountain, the blind can see and the dumb can speak." These are words which we should repeat constantly.

Yet suppose that in spite of our prayers, in spite of all our efforts we meet with apparent defeat; suppose we feel that the thing we thought could happen never will and that the great Miracle Maker has failed us somehow. We must never permit ourselves to partake of failure even though the results are seemingly imperfect. Instead our understanding should be that our whole life is taking a new direction thereby; that we are building a new world, a spiritual consciousness, a new awareness of our place in the universe. And though at the moment it may seem dark and we may feel limitation and sorrow, still our faith is like a beacon and we walk in its light.

Faith is the great miracle worker. Everything we had ever done in life, everything that has been created by man, great or small, has had faith as its basis. If we read the lives of great men we find how they worked against all sorts of obstacles. They were willing to sacrifice, to suffer and to die for that which they wished to bring about; they believed in their ability to do so; they had confidence in themselves and in their God. What we believe about ourselves will surely make us either a hero or a weakling. If we could eliminate fear we would become like a roaring lion in our courage. We could persuade ourselves

into God-consciousness and would be able to touch divine heights. Nothing could ever stop us. Each man should be aware of this in his own heart; he must be alight with the light of God, and gradually that light will spread until the whole world becomes illumined.

Feel that in the midst of what we think is darkness a light is being kindled and that men, instead of following their small complacent ways, are being stirred to their very depths; that this great mass of humanity is being prodded into a faith in its own power and its own dignity. Let us carry the flame within us; let us realize that in our true self we are an expression of Godhead and that no one who really believes in that One can ever be lost.

This is the kind of faith that takes a man's hand and leads him unscathed through life and death. It lifts him up and up until he stands on the mountain top and looks down into the valley of darkness below and realizes that it lies under a veil of mist; that the light of the eternal sun will dissipate the mist and that that sun is forever shining within our hearts. This is what faith can do for us if we pray for it, use it and go forward by its light.

Pray to Him with yearning heart, and weep. That will purify your heart. You see the reflection of the sun in clear water. In the mirror of his "I-consciousness" the devotee sees that form of the Primal Energy, Brahman with attributes. But the mirror must be wiped clear.

—*Sri Ramakrishna*

THE FEELING OF GOD

by George W. F. Hegel

We know that in religion we withdraw ourselves from what is temporal, and that religion is for our consciousness that region in which all the enigmas of the world are solved, all the contradictions of deeper-reaching thought have their meaning unveiled, and where the voice of the heart's pain is silenced — the region of eternal truth, of eternal rest, of eternal peace. Speaking generally, it is through thought, concrete thought, or, to put it more definitely, it is by reason of his being Spirit, that man is man; and from man as Spirit proceed all the many developments of the sciences and arts, the interests of political life, and all those conditions which have reference to man's freedom and will. But all these manifold forms of human relations, activities, and pleasures, and all the ways in which these are intertwined; all that has worth and dignity for man, all wherein he seeks his happiness, his glory, and his pride, finds its ultimate center in religion, in the thought, the consciousness, and the feeling of God. Thus God is the beginning of all things, and the end of all things. As all things proceed from this point, so all return back to it again. He is the center which gives life and quickening to all things, and which animates and preserves in existence all the various forms of being. In religion man places himself in a relation to this center, in which all other relations concentrate themselves, and in so doing he rises up to the highest level of consciousness and to the region which is free from relation to what

is other than itself, to something which is absolutely self-sufficient, the unconditioned, what is free, and is its own object and end.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

by Sri Mata Gayatri Devi

We believe in God who is One without a second.

We believe He is absolute and impersonal.

We believe that though He is indivisible, beyond name and form, yet He assumes many forms, is sought through many names and revealed through infinite manifestations.

We believe that man is related to God.

We believe that man is primarily a soul, a part of the Cosmic Soul.

We believe that the aim and objective of human life is to realize the unity of the individual soul with the Cosmic Soul.

We believe that all the Incarnations are veritable embodiments of Divinity.

We believe that no one Incarnation can be regarded as the only and total manifestation of that Divinity.

We believe that there are many ways following which man can reach this union — the unity of the soul with the Oversoul.

We believe that a specific path should be followed to realize the aim and objectives of life.

We believe that there is no accident in the cosmic universe.

We believe that human destiny is controlled by the Law of Cause and Effect.

We believe that man is born on earth repeatedly to finish the unfinished work of realizing his goal.

We believe that man suffers because of his own action.

We believe that man can be the controller of his own action.

We believe that man can transcend his destiny.

We believe that there is no permanent heaven.

We believe that there is no permanent hell.

We believe that there is a higher state of consciousness.

We believe that that state can be achieved here and now in this human birth.

I could continue to enumerate, but think I have pointed out briefly the basic concepts that constitute the religious philosophy known as Vedanta. Perhaps we should add one more statement which is: We believe that man must practice his religion in order to arrive at his goal. It is this we wish to emphasize primarily. Tenets and beliefs can be found in all religions and in all religious philosophies, but our aim has always been how, by using and applying them, we may gain the desired result.

The most encouraging feature of Vedanta is that it gives infinite liberty and scope. It allows for time and means so that each one can follow what is constitutionally and temperamentally suited to his own need. In this Vedanta is extremely individualistic.

The vital part of religion is likely to be overlooked when we emphasize creed. What is the most important factor in religion? It is finding union with the Supreme and knowing how we may remain united. What good is it to believe that we are veritable gods or divine embodiments as long

as we do not carry the thought further. In order to do this we have to practice yoga — a technique that helps to unite the individual soul with the Cosmic Soul so that we may realize the aim and objective of life and *become* the Cosmic Soul. What a wonderful opportunity is ours! However, if we do not use this opportunity we cannot blame God; we can blame only ourselves, our ignorance, our delusion, our lack of aspiration and drive.

There is one question that is often put before the Vedantist: If God is the aim and end of human existence then why does not man seek and desire Him? There are millions and billions and trillions of souls everywhere. If what Vedanta proclaims is really so — that the chief objective of life is knowledge of and union with God — then why do we not find human beings as a whole trying to make this their primary purpose? Why are they not striving for this attainment above all else? The answer to these questions is that man is not yet awakened to the awareness of this goal. Most of us are blind and ignorant and caught in the meshes of maya or delusion. We are attached to everything here — earth's comforts and pleasures; also we think of heaven as being a counterpart of earth, although much better, a place where we shall have our final abode. We even conceive of it as being made of gold and pearls and other material treasures which we value on earth. This is no doubt the product of our imagination. However, imagination is good; indeed, it plays a great part in our presentation of Truth. But we also need discernment and insight in order to separate the spiritual from the material, the wheat from the

chaff, and we can reach this understanding only by the quickening of soul consciousness.

While seeking Truth we have to find a way which will lead us to our goal. Vedanta as a religious philosophy states specifically that every one of us can have God-union, God-consciousness, God-knowledge, illumination, superconsciousness, but we must follow a path. Truth is one, but the paths are many and we are at liberty to choose that path which will suit our need and temperament. Such a path usually combines various disciplines and practices. Who and what will determine our path? It is the individual's own need, his capacity, aptitude and qualifications. Every one of us possesses these in one form or another, but what we should do is to develop them along the right line.

Real seekers are interested in Truth and have little or no use for man-made doctrines. Heaven may appear very desirable to those who are materialistic in their inclination. But when we have been quickened spiritually and understand even vaguely the meaning of our existence we will not be seeking out comfort; instead, we will be searching for Truth. And for the Truth-seeker the promise of ultimate attainment is not only enthralling, it is compelling. As the soul consciousness awakens within us, the glamour and fascination of the world that distracts the soul from seeking God becomes less and less. It is then that we begin to shed the garb of layers and layers of materialism and put on the mantle of spirit.

Once we have been convinced that we are here

in order to reach and become one with our Origin, we can no longer sit idle and do nothing. Religion then ceases to be a matter of accepting or reciting the Creed or just believing in it. Suppose we were impressed with the idea that there is only one Savior, one divine Incarnation who can unite us with Godhead; even then we must go further than merely to believe in it. We have to adopt a way, a technique, which would serve our purpose by bringing about the union we desire. This is what the teaching of Vedanta demands: We must be practical; religion must be more than belief or concept; it must be experience. Just think how gratifying it will be when we are able to say, "I know that God can be felt and experienced."

This is a tremendously powerful belief in our philosophy: God who is spoken of as incomprehensible, regarded as beyond mind and speech, defined by the philosophers as abstract and absolute, can be known and seen and felt.

At this point let us not misunderstand and say, "Oh yes, I think this refers to some of my visions, my experience of the supernatural." In the truest sense religious experience in not just psychic perception or access into occult phenomena. It is much more than that. To be authentic, to be real, it can come only from a person who is on the true path, never from anyone who is following a by-path. Investigation of the extrasensory realm does not necessarily imply a soul's yearning to know God. The individual must cultivate and exercise discrimination in the course he choses, otherwise he will surely be misled.

In order to pursue the path of yoga the chief requirement is the dedication of oneself to a Power who is the object of all search and aspiration. We must be resolute, determined and absolutely steadfast in practice before results can be had. Effects can never be produced where there is no labor, no struggle and no effort. That is the reason that people can go to church throughout the year, subscribe to a faith and yet not become spiritualized. They do not develop into Godly beings because they are not using religion or its disciplines in the right way.

The aim of life is to become one with the Supreme; therefore, we have to seek the means in order to achieve our end. Going to church is one of them, but only a minor one. This habit is good because it affords us opportunity to worship and commune in the proper environment. But much more must be added to it, and that is entirely a personal matter. If we desire and long for final union, then we will have to live the spiritual life. This is putting Vedanta in the simplest form. We must make our religion living, an inseparable light of our everyday existence; and living our religion entails a great deal.

All religious practice begins with a rational assumption. We believe in the Truth but we really do not know it; we have not yet experienced it, even though we may have become aware of it. Then what are our assumptions? They are, of course, the experiences of others. But let us not confuse them with doctrines and dogmas. These are entirely different. The one who experiences is

he who, believing in himself as a soul, experiments with religion and arrives at union. He may say to us, "God is. He is the sum and substance of existence. He is not a fable or a myth; He actually is dwelling in the heart of our own being." We may not be sure of this, but we believe in his statements, do we not? Why? Because it is not some ignorant man who has put the idea before us, but someone trustworthy, someone upon whose word we can depend. This trust we must have, otherwise we cannot follow the religious path. What we assume to be true is based on the realization of some trained soul who has gone ahead of us, one who has found the Truth and has given us the benefit of his discovery. This is where we begin, and as we continue to use this trusted knowledge and apply it, revelation gradually unfolds through our own mind, intellect and consciousness.

Because we are individual souls most of us feel a natural separateness from God. Also we are mainly ego-conscious. Our entire interest in life and the expression of that interest proceeds from this separate ego-sense. We do not really love anyone as much as we love ourselves unless we happen to be a very unselfish person. But such a person is most rare and hard to find in our world. When we come to know and see that all human beings are ourselves, that they are the same as we are and not different, that we are the One divided into many, the little self is wiped away and our love expands to embrace all that lives. It is then and only then that we can claim to have arrived at our goal and attained the whole.

These are some of the truths that we vaguely know and strive to comprehend. But as soon as we set our feet upon the path and the practice begins, results commence to follow. At first we may not altogether understand because we are working on assumption, but as we use and assimilate the Truth that was discovered by others before us, it becomes more and more a part of us. With the advance of time and our own development, other people's needs, sorrows and well-being become as much a concern to us as our very own, and we see no difference between ourselves and others.

Have we ever thought about why the great souls suffer so? They are free spirits; they have no karma of their own. They have cleared their debt, have risen above the Law and yet they continue to be afflicted. It is simply because they have identified themselves with others. It was said of Lord Buddha: "Why is Manjusri ill?" a disciple asked. "Because," came the reply. "there is so much sickness in the world." Also we read of Sri Ramakrishna that when he saw from a distance two boatmen fighting he shuddered because he felt the blows on his own flesh. This was not imagination, for his highly sensitive nature could actually feel them.

The same sensitiveness is ours, too, even though we are on a lower spiritual level than the saints and saviors. Through sympathy we can have identification with the sorrows and afflictions that overpower mankind. But this is not helpful, for it is only when we can transcend these woes by

first becoming identified with That which is beyond sickness and sorrow that our usefulness becomes assured.

As we can feel intensely through identification, so also can we be absolutely liberated through non-identification. Now this may sound like a contradiction, but there is no non-identification of the individual unless he has released his ego-bound consciousness and has united it with the Cosmic. This is what the practice of yoga will do for us. Prayer, devotion, unselfish action, discrimination and meditation are all means to the end, but there must be a conscious striving on our part to follow the practice regularly, in a specific way. Sometimes we will be successful and show gain; again, feel discouraged and disappointed, yet we must struggle on, and eventually by sustained effort and divine grace we will be lead to the highest state.

It is the practice that should be stressed always, over and over. We must keep our concepts and beliefs in the back of our mind because they are very helpful, but we must emphasize the practical application of Truth by the means that have been handed down to us from the Great Ones. When we are able to do this we continue to grow and evolve spiritually and cease to be mere human beings. We become liberated from the misconception that we are the body and come to know ourselves as we truly are — living spirits, omnipotent souls. It is in order to be able to rise to this liberated, exalted, enlightened state that we move along on the spiritual path, struggling, stumbling, but finally

achieving our end. Vedanta assures us that the goal is promised; we shall realize God, we shall attain cosmic consciousness, we shall be raised to oneness with the Absolute here and now in this very life.

WISDOM OF RAMAKRISHNANANDA

To realize God is the aim of religion. The ideal of every religion is God and God alone. Hence we must not find fault with other forms of religion or with differences in external manners and customs. That which makes up the external is the shell. . . . It is always rough and hard, yet it has one advantage, it preserves the kernel.

True religion teaches not how to go to heaven but how to go to God.

The struggle against bad habits, against . . . false ideas, is known as practical religion. It cannot be theoretical in any way. A man may say, "I am eternal, perfect, infinite," but if he has not realized it, his words will mean nothing. When you say, "I am all-knowing," and know it, then you have become it.

. . . The Vedanta says that nothing exists outside yourself, the whole universe is in you. God is within you. He is the only solution to the otherwise insolvable problem of life and death. It is for Him that the human soul has been longing without knowing it. Imprisoned as we are in the body and the mind and in the maze of this phenomenal world, how can it be possible for us to find God? The real Lord of ourselves is the Infinite One

beyond all space, time, and causation. . . . He is in me, nearer to me than myself. My Beloved, whom I have always been seeking in the external world, is within me. So let me dive deeper and deeper into my own self to find Him. This is the dualistic mode of realizing God, according to Vedanta.

The path of devotion is the best, as it is the most natural. Be devoted to God who is inside you. . . . The temples outside are mere reminders of the real inner Temple.

Through devotion liberation is very easily realized. It gives the lover his Beloved. After finally reaching Him for whom the soul has all the time been panting and struggling, is there any more work for it to do? In Him it rests. Him it feels to be the highest. This is the final goal in the dualistic interpretation of the Vedanta.

The true lover of God must be more than perfect. For a perfect man may be self-contained and self-satisfied, but he may not have the power of satisfying others, just as a reservoir of water, full to the brim, is self-contained and lives only in itself. Not so the perennial spring, which is not only full in itself, but also springs out of itself with overflowing munificence for the sake of others. A true devotee is like that. He lives not so much for himself as for his Beloved and for those who belong to Him.

There is but one yoga and that is devotion. The karmi may say that he attains the Supreme by non-attachment; the jnani that he gets there by

the path of discrimination; and the raja-yogi by the path of concentration. But if the karmi has not devotion in his practice of non-attachment; or the jnani in his discrimination; or the raja-yogi in his concentration, he will not realize his Ideal. Devotion is the only means for all.

Do not care if you slip occasionally. To err is human. Do not lose heart. Walk firmly onward. No man can hope to get through the slimy path of the world unscathed. And it is rank foolishness to sit down in the midst of the mire for fear of falling in the attempt to get across.

Every child, when it is learning to walk, falls down a hundred times, but it never gives up. . . . Rest assured, you will conquer in the end. As long as you are less than you yourself wish to be, never give up the struggle.

We should surrender ourselves to Him, depend on Him entirely, and constantly pray for His grace with tearful eyes. His grace dawns when he sees that we really love Him and want Him only. . . . When the mind is entirely engrossed with worldly objects what is the use of making a lip-prayer to God? Such shallow love cannot move His heart. When this hypocrisy goes and the mind becomes pure and simple like that of a child we shall be blessed with His grace.

In order to realize God you must worship Him with your whole heart; and the man who has realized God is perfectly happy. Even if he should go to hell, he would be in heaven, for he lives in God, and where God is, that is heaven.

MY MOTHER'S FACE

by Swami Parampanthi

A happy, serious and kind face looms large and radiant in my memory and vision — a delicate, revealing and inspiring face that reflects all the glory and failure, anguish and bliss, which a mother alone experiences through the ups and downs of life, in all times and climes. This is why always, the world over, the face of a mother has been the eternal object of reverence and love, of wonder and admiration. Motherhood has been extolled by the poets and philosophers and praised by the mystics and saints. From the cry of Christ on the cross, "Woman, behold thy son," to the present-day exaltation of motherhood in all cultures, primitive and sophisticated, we come to the one unequivocal conclusion that motherhood is a universal truth and reality of life.

Throughout the ages the miracle of motherhood has been the perennial grandeur of creation in which the process of evolution crystallizes the change from nonbeing into Being. Thus motherhood is the symbolic mirror wherein the entire mystery of the human drama stands revealed. We think of a mother in terms of creation and birth because she is the gateway to our embodiment on earth. Birth is the baptism of motherhood because without it there cannot be any human existence. The Buddhas and the Christs revealed themselves to the universe through this inevitable medium; hence, mankind's debt to mother is everlasting. We exist — in fact, the whole of creation exists — because of this miracle.

Mother is the familiar figure in the checkered history of man through the rise and fall of civilizations, social and political upheavals, and mystical movements. She returns to man again and again in the humble life of her family, in times of need and consolation and in deeper moments of mystical awareness, in the vision of a tremendous mother — God. In religion and mysticism motherhood occupies an abiding place because a mother is the golden bridge between man and the Divine, between earth and heaven, between what is tangible and intelligible and what is inexplicable and unknown. Thus mother alone is privileged and honored to stand as the medium to unite God and man, interpreting the divine ways to man and reconciling the contradictions of existence on earth through her own being.

In Hindu philosophy mother is a very familiar person, a friend in need, a source of solace and, at the same time the reality expressing the immensity of God in the creation and destruction of the cosmic universe. She is divine as well as human; she is at once the inexplicable presence and the concrete expression of love and bliss. So man effortlessly raises mother to the ground of divinity and sees the cosmic Mother in the human mother of infinite tenderness.

On our level mother interprets the perpetual paradox of birth and death, creation and dissolution; she is the witness of the unfolding universe which springs from her own buoyant being. When death threatens, darkness descends on mother's face, and out of heart-rending agony poignant

prayers rise like wave after wave to God in hopeful yearning. Should death eventually claim her child, still she triumphs, for basically she is aware of the drama of life, its beginning and end, its good and evil. She accepts the inevitable with all its diverse phases. In the face of death a mother somehow knows in her heart that human existence is not interminably blocked by this tragedy. She realizes that finite, limited man steps from the confines of mortality toward ultimate freedom.

In Hindu religion we find the most sublime concept which harmonizes divinity in woman with the motherhood of God. A Hindu visualizes the creative aspect of the Supreme Godhead as the Mother Supreme, the active substratum of the whole universe. She is the life and force behind and in creation. She is the absolute, impersonal Godhead made personal for the humble devotee, the propitious object of adoration and worship. Again, She is the fierce power in the battlefield of destruction. She is the benevolent, compassionate Mother, also the terrible. She is beyond the polarity of creation — the great unknown, the mysterious Thou. Her wrath dissolves the whole universe; still She dances in the innermost cave of man's heart.

Divine Mother is the creator and destroyer of the universe. The entire creative process can function only through the dualism of creation and dissolution and the very nature of divine power expressing itself in the form of the cosmic Mother makes this possible. But life does not end in the dualism of birth and death; life ends in

unity with the Divine which is beyond this duality. The motherhood of God is the medium and the supreme goal of man, of all creation. When we become a witness to the play of life with its rhythm of birth and death and are no longer terrified by the Mother in Her destructive aspect; when we have transcended joy and pain, Divine Mother uncovers Her real Essence which is above and beyond all duality. Divine Mother is the eternal mystery — on one hand the cause of man's bondage, on the other, his liberator. She tests man with the baptism of fire and knowledge; She teases and plays and binds man; and She purifies, liberates and enlightens. But Her play is not arbitrary, nor is it whimsical; it is in accordance with the laws of life in their spiritual intensity. Her grace is conditional upon human endeavor; Her favor is not indiscriminate. She is the eternal fountain of love and compassion, truth and knowledge, beauty and goodness.

The Divine Mother appeals because of the human element in our concept. Tiny, insignificant man is awed by the non-human majesty of God, with whom he does not find any real point of contact. Man is puny, limited, branded with irrevocable finitude and mortality; God, the impersonal, limitless, unknowable and incomprehensible. Man struggles and strains, and striving to understand Godhead, he feels anguish. Suddenly he turns and looks at his mother's face! Suddenly he remembers the joy of that face. How soothing, tender, ethereal is the touch of her hands! How serene, dignified and graceful are her movements.

He remembers the music of the voice which never loses its melodious cadence in the face of crisis and pain. She walks beside her family, a gentle saintly figure; her footsteps, light and restrained, and never striding in anger or rebellion. Keeping watch at night, sleeplessly, by the bedside of a sick child, she is dauntless in her love. The ceaseless stroke of her hands that restores many a child to the miracle of health is her benediction. Therefore, to a man the human mother is the receptacle of intense pathos. Ever victorious in life and death, through countless deepening experiences of joy and sorrow, she is enriched and becomes a univarsal being. She is divine and human at the same time.

Thus man sees in the lengthened reflection of his own mother the divine motherhood of God. God is no longer remote, indifferent and impersonal. He has crystallized into the mother, lovable and loving, tender and forgiving. The seeker of God, the aspirant becomes Her humble devotee. Reason gives way to faith, and the audacity that tries to pierce the veil of ignorance by self-effort yields in complete self-surrender to the Mother.

Worship of God as Mother is essential for most aspirants because it brings God assuredly near and makes Him humanly intelligible and concrete. However, this is merely the beginning. As one advances along the path he recognizes more and more the nature and essence of the absolute Godhead. Finally the Supreme Identity is reached by transcendence of dualism and God is no longer an object of adoration, but rather the devotee's own

inseparable Self. *Thou art That* — is the last stage in the evolution of the spirit.

After all has been said and done the son returns to behold the face of his own mother. Naturally and invariably the inquiry wells up in his heart: What immortal elements make my mother's face so unusual, so complete in beauty and grace, in spirit and divinity? Since the dawn of creation the answer has encompassed the whole spectrum of man's life and destiny; yet I venture to answer.

My mother's face is ageless and sublime. It is the symbol of eternity wherein the perennial beat of creation unfolds its cosmic story in the fullness of love, devotion, service, nobility and sacrifice. Her face is multipersonal and sensitive, an image of God which reflects the profundity and intensity of human development in all its stages from the cradle to the grave. Her face is the comprehensively clear mirror of life that presents a complete picture of creation, growth, decay, death — the rhythm of war and peace, the dualism of bondage and liberation. It is the receptacle of all racial memories, sad and blissful, that cannot fade into oblivion; for every event of her life goes to weave the indelible lines of her remarkable visage. Her face is the living index of the past, the flow of the present, and the vision of the future, whereupon all things good, bad and indifferent are traced. My mother's face is the Divine Mother's face revealing a universality, and a unity of all things and beings, of human values and divine grace. Her face is the shining majesty of a Mother whose eyes speak the language of deathless love.

A MASON'S BELIEF

by Henry S. C. Cummings

Our dream of a Universal Brotherhood, free of dogma, must somehow eliminate hideous forms of selfishness, such as prejudice and intolerance. Our highest aspirations, however, have spiritual significance. As with transient horizons we see but never quite reach, our aspirations have the quality of infinite expectation. So many things like this are beyond the known — at least, till we quest for them. We probe matter, penetrate space, expose nature's elements — till the indiscernible emerges as something articulate and tangible — an intelligence that lightens the lives of men.

We have learned how to transcend terrestrial boundaries and bridge technological barriers — but, how vague is our knowledge of the depth of love, the width of truth, the breadth of spirit, the infinity of life — and the allness of God. Is it not as though we were still spiritually adolescent, groping as children, stumbling and frustrated, awaiting someone to lead us to the dawn of "divine living" — where good will and mutual understanding, spiritual unity and brotherhood await trial? Since we are all part of mankind, humanity and civilization, in a world where science has unlocked myriad doorways to understanding, how can it be that there is not a corresponding evolution in human kinship? As we probe spirit, penetrate life, reveal God's love, will not "spiritual truth" evolve to give us the light for which we have so greatly yearned?

FROM AN INDIAN JOURNEY

by Astrid Setterwall Angstrom

As the sun, reflected in different pools of water, appears as so many suns, so Thou, too, O Mother, dost appear as many through delusion. But still Thou art the One without a second, known as the Brahman Supreme. —MAHAKALASAMHITA

It is Saturday, one of the days specially devoted to the worship of the Universal Mother. The rituals are performed before the flower-decked portraits of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sri Ma. On the walls of this small shrine are pictures of Sri Krishna-Chaitanya, Sankaracharya, Gautama Buddha, Jesus Christ and others. In the joyful gratitude that these God men have lived on earth, their birthdays are looked forward to and they are honored by wreaths of flowers and the reading of their words. By and by the temple hall is filled with children and young, middle-aged, and old women. The boys and men occupy the veranda.

Beside me sits a fat, dark-skinned woman in a deep green cotton sari with red borders. A badly healed scar disfigures her face. Evidently it pains her to sit cross-legged for she moves the weight of her body from one side to the other. She seems restless, but the moment she closes her eyes she becomes concentrated. And when the singing begins she joins in with her rich powerful contralto and it seems that she praises the Mother with body, heart and soul.

On my other side sits an elderly woman whose face bears the marks of refinement. In the wing

of her acquiline nose a jewel gleams. Her garment, tinged with red and black, is discreet and distinguished. At her other side sits a child of three or four years — apparently her granddaughter. At first the little one stares at me, wide-eyed, with undisguised astonishment. Then she creeps so near that she almost touches me. I pass my hand slowly over her downy cheeks. She moves away and starts to pull the braids of the girl in front of her who snatches her hair away, turns around and frowns. The little one throws herself backwards into her grandmother's arms. The grandmother is not disturbed in her devotions but rather gives her a loving smile, and the child leans against her. When the singing begins she moves her arms to its rhythm, slowly at first, missing a beat; then suddenly she seems to be at one with the music. A fascinating, natural dance movement takes place at my side. It is as if the little girl experiences dramatically the meaning of the song. We sing an old melody, singular, and simple as a folk song:

"O auspicious One, Thou art the source
of all auspiciousness.
Thou art the accomplisher of all
cherished desires.
Thou art the giver of refuge.
Thou possessest the eye of wisdom and
beautiful form.
O Thou Power divine, salutations to
Thee.
O eternal One, Thou art the energy of
creation, maintenance and destruction.

Thou art the abode of different modes
of energy
And art yet beyond them.
O Thou Power divine, salutations to Thee.
O Mother, Thou art the savior of the
distressed and of the care-worn
Who take refuge in Thee.
Thou art the remover of the misery of
all.
O Thou Power divine, salutations to
Thee."

Straight backs, bluish-black heads, with shiny braids or with jasmines stuck into big knots — this is what I see before me. The soft brown faces with their closed eyes reveal poise and peacefulness. From the veranda comes the sound of the harmonium, the drum and the cymbals. Now and then a man's voice rises in a solo; it is a pleasant voice, versatile in this supple way of singing. The cool evening breeze, heavy with fragrance, sweeps in over us.

To worship the Mother is to touch the life principle. She is the Consciousness that is identical with Supreme Being. She has many names: Devi, Durga, Uma, Kali, Rudrani, Annapurna, Maya — each name representing some aspect of Sakti, the creative Power.

In the passage outside the hall, blessed rosewater to drink is poured into my cupped hands, and small girls offer me *prasad* (consecrated food). Here for the first time I meet Lakshmiammal, a holy woman from one of the small villages nearby. She is of plain and insignificant appearance. Her

head is shaven and she wears the colorless sari of a widow. The only remarkable thing about her is her eyes. They shine like flames. My friend, Padma, introduces me to her. We put our hands together in the greeting which means, "God within me greets the God within you." I am strangely aware of those eyes that convey an inner light; but she knows no English and I, no Tamil. I ask Parma to tell me about her.

Mathusri Lakshmiammal became a widow at the age of eight. And, according to tradition, the Indian widow devotes herself entirely to religious life; no other path is open to her; she must eat only one hearty meal a day, wear no colors, no jewelry and must not marry again. Lakshmiammal's father, who became her spiritual teacher, was a Sanskrit scholar. The members of his family had for more than five hundred years followed the Tantric system of religion which considers the Divine Mother as the highest Reality. Today Lakshmiammal travels about performing the worship of Divine Mother, Annapurna, in whichever house she herself chooses. It is said of her that she always lives in a state of bliss. She thinks of nothing but God, talks of nothing but God, and she praises Him with poetry and song.

* * *

Lakshmiammal is seated on the floor in the middle of the room. In front of her is her own golden image of Annapurna. The Divine is regarded as being personified in the image. Water is placed before the goddess as a symbol of purity, and fire burns on the altar, signifying Brahman

and the light in the human soul which thus is given back to its Origin. Flowers are offered as an expression of the devotion of the heart. Through devotion material things are changed into spiritual realities. In ritualistic worship the Supreme Reality is attained through the gradual ascending of the mind from the manifested to the unmanifested. When the worshipper and the worshipped are united through supreme devotion, Samadhi is experienced.

Now and then Lakshmiammal interrupts her Sanskrit readings and addresses herself to my companion, the "tall brahmin," in quick Tamil. He translates: "In *puja* (ritualistic worship) nothing is material; the moment the worship reaches its climax and the Divinity becomes alive, then the self meets the Self. That is perfection."

The worship will continue for hours; we must leave. As we say farewell to the master of the house in the outer hall he expresses his regret that we have not heard Lakshmiammal sing. Before he has stopped speaking a girl comes running from the shrine room and conveys the message that just now Lakshmiammal is going to sing. We turn back and sit down again. She sings, with a clear girlish voice, a song that is born of the moment, simple and touching: "I do not desire heavenly bliss; I do not desire liberation; May I be born again to serve Thee and those who are Thy servants."

When at last we leave the "tall brahmin" says to me, "It is to our women that we must be grateful, because they keep the religious tradition alive.

They have kept Annapurna living through milleniums — Annapura who signifies bounteous, ever-sustaining, ever-flowing life! It says in the Upanishad: 'All that is invisible is verily the Infinite Brahman. All that is visible is also the Infinite Brahman. The whole universe has come out of the Infinite Brahman. Brahman is infinite although the whole universe has come out of It'."

* * *

Lakshmiammal has given me some leaves from a diary. They are stray and fragmentary dialogues between herself and her father. Padma translates them for me, saying that her own language is so lofty and spontaneously beautiful that it is almost impossible to render it in another language.

When the youth who had been selected as her husband died, Lakshmiammal's father was deeply moved by the tragedy in his young daughter's life. He did not want her to live a religious life merely because no other way lay open to her. He wanted to give her every opportunity for living a rich, comprehensive life in order that she might appreciate the precious gift of human life. Therefore, he took upon himself the responsibility for her inner training; he taught her the Sanskrit language, and helped her to penetrate the meaning of the scriptures. Thus an unusual relationship was established between father and daughter — that of teacher and disciple, one the sower, the other the fertile soil receiving the seed of spiritual living.

The dialogues take place in an isolated country home. The father has other disciples. They come

in the morning for instruction and then, after showing respect to their guru, they take their leave. When father and daughter are alone the talks begin:

DAUGHTER: Do the devotees who were with us a while ago live in inner harmony? Have they a cosmic vision and insight? Do they look upon all paths leading to the Ultimate with equal understanding?

FATHER: It cannot be said so. Some of them follow the road of Karma — the path of action, others that of Jnana — the path of knowledge, and yet others the path Bhakti — devotion. Each proceeds along his own way towards the goal which is the same for all. They are not fully matured or realized souls. Perhaps only one in countless millions will become a complete and integrated personality, combining the essence of all these converging methods and moods. To be born as a human being is in itself an expression of divine grace, and many, many lives as such have to be lived before one reaches the state of realization. With intense and unswerving faith one must practice the teachings given by the guru, perfecting oneself by severe, critical self-analysis and introspection.

DAUGHTER: I am hungry to learn from your lotus-lips the honey of philosophy. I wish to sanctify my life by serving you, my preceptor. Bless me and do not reject me as unworthy of your compassion.

FATHER: Child, my beloved one, you too can have that knowledge! This divine treasure can

be shared only with those who are fit to receive it; it cannot be bought or had for the asking. Do not worry! The purpose of human birth is to obtain Self-knowledge and Self-realization. It gives me great joy to impart to you its secrets. My only misgiving is that I am very old and you are a young girl. I do not know if I will live long enough to see you complete your training. I can show you the way and even lead you by the hand for a few steps; but you must do the real climbing yourself. Self-effort and intense work, perseverance and patience are necessary. And above all: Never lose heart!

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DAUGHTER: In quest of Self-realization, is anyone disqualified because of sex, caste, color or creed, or is it possible for all?

FATHER: Child, there is no distinction between souls — only stages of development and awareness. The Truth to be realized by all is that nothing exists except the Supreme Spirit, Brahman — the source of creation, preservation and destruction. We mortals have taken birth in Him, live in Him, and will again be absorbed in Him. Brahman is the only Reality. All else is illusory.

DAUGHTER: If Brahman alone is real and all else is illusory, is it not then a folly to have so many temples to different gods and goddesses?

FATHER: The temples are necessary; they have their purpose; but the seers of Truth have no need of them. There is no evidence in the experience of our senses; nor is there any substantial relationship between Truth and our sense

impressions. To believe that family members and friends such as they appear are the only reality is foolish. Temples and holy places and rivers are designed as stepping stones on our journey. We may use them in passing, but must move on. The recital of holy texts and hymns, the practice of meditation and concentration are meant to purify the soul, cleanse it of dross and draw the soul closer to its goal which is Self-realization. Some exploit the use of rituals for selfish ends or observe them only mechanically and are thereby aimlessly deluding themselves. The true seers perform their daily duties as commandments of God, the Operator of the universe. They act only at His behest — without thought of self-gratification or attachment to results. Their detachment does not mean indifference or disinterestedness. They fulfill their purpose on earth. Holy in themselves and living in holy company they bestow kindness and compassion on all.

DAUGHTER: On hearing your honey-sweet words, waves of bliss beat against the shore of my heart.

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DAUGHTER: You are father and mother to me. In great reverence I bow down at your feet. Do not plunge me into the abyss of worldly life! I shudder at the thought of being injured by the love of the senses, like a deer drawn by pleasant sounds, a moth by the tempting flame, a bee by the flower. My desire is to be free from all bondage, to swim in the ocean of bliss and not be caught in the trammels of life. I beseech you to bless and teach me.

FATHER: Yes, I shall teach you. You are entitled to Self-knowledge and you will be initiated into its quest. Remember nothing is impossible to man or woman! No one is barred from Self-knowledge. It is important for you to be consistent and earnest of purpose. The realized souls are the jewels of the earth, the wealth of their motherland. They are free from every thought of ego. They treat all alike. Who can describe such men and women possessed of God! In this quest only a few succeed; you my child, are blessed and will be one of those few.

DAUGHTER: Can even a disciple impart this knowledge to others?

FATHER: Yes, a chosen disciple can do it.

DAUGHTER: How can the pure knowledge of Self, of the One without a second, the Absolute, the Ultimate, Brahman, come to one like me?

FATHER: With the aid of the supreme qualities — truthfulness, purity, cleanliness in thoughts, words and deeds, tranquility, sense-control — you too can attain Truth. Child, you are of divine essence! You are full of spiritual tendencies, so for you, through His grace, the path will be comparatively easy. All you need is sincere self-effort and perseverence.

DAUGHTER: Are Brahman and the great Self one and the same?

FATHER: Yes, my daughter, they are one, Yet, failing to see the eternal Soul in his own self, man destroys himself. Realization comes when self meets Self.

DAUGHTER: One doubt, my master: In order

to obtain Self-knowledge, is the external worship — of images — necessary, as well as meditation?

FATHER: Yes, my child, both are necessary to a certain stage. But as I have said before, they are only means to an end; they are the road, not the destination. The use of mantram is valuable too, because mantram contains the vital essence of the worship through an external object. As one proceeds with the practice of meditation, the Object becomes clear and real, intimate and subjective. Who can describe the joy of communion with one's divine inner Self! The word "sugar" indicates sweetness, but in order really to know what sugar is one must taste for himself.

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FATHER: I have imparted to you the secret of reaching the inward bliss, this overflowing inexpressible joy! May God's grace be upon your endeavors, my child! My blessings will follow you.

The body is an instrument of carnal pleasures, the arena for the devil-dance of the senses. It is to be purified, made into a divine temple, a sublime edifice dedicated to the fulfillment of your spiritual purpose. To that end you must keep it in good physical condition. It is a tool and as such it must be fit for its work, but it should be looked upon as only a tool.

DAUGHTER: Your instructions make my mind tranquil and free from dross. It has become like an unflickering flame in a windless place. To have a mind full of grace is necessary, because it is the mind that is responsible for good and evil. Its nature is to waver and wander, but now it has

become like a bright lamp, a waveless ocean of peace.

FATHER: Although the mind becomes silent only on the frontiers of sound, and silence conserves mental and physical energy, remember that sound also is a manifestation of the Deity. Sound is the source of all arts and emotional expressions. The goddess of knowledge is also the goddess of music. The identification of sound, of word with its meaning, is as absolute as the relationship of Truth and Brahman. The soul itself is free from the changes of birth, growth, decay and death. It is timeless. It is a part of the eternal Oversoul; material variations cannot alter this essential kinship. A pot of clay is not different from clay.

When we can differentiate the shape from the substance, the non-essential from the essential, and see the basic oneness of all things, then we are on the way to realization. "Om" is the fundamental primordial sound of Brahman. From It all other sounds are derived. It contains within itself the untouchable, the unseeable and the illimitable silence — as well as all the vocal arts, and expressions.

DAUGHTER: Father, I am grateful. All I have received is due to your benevolence!

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FATHER: Brahman is inexplicable but a fit disciple can understand, experience and realize That through the grace of his guru. It behooves you in due course of time to establish an ashrama and put into practice all that which by self-effort you have learned from me.

FATHER: Through the infinite mercy of goddess Annapurna, you will soon have another guru who will initiate you into the secrets of Tantric worship. It is said that women are the repositories of such secrets, so it is only proper at this stage that you should have a woman preceptor.

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FATHER: To be born as a human being is in itself a divine grace. On the spiritual path everyone faces difficulties and tribulations. We must overcome them by the exercise of will while we are still in full possession of our senses. This however is not possible without the grace of Divine Mother, the Supreme Spirit. By worshipping Her incessantly, with unshakable faith, we can go beyond all miseries.

DAUGHTER: Is the recitation and repetition of the holy name useful?

FATHER: Yes. It is just as when we call the name of a person: We think of him, his image rises in our minds and mentally we establish contact with him. Or, if we want our letters to reach someone, we must write the correct address. So by constant repetition of the name of Divine Mother — the Eternal Spirit visualized as mother — we call upon Her mentally and our prayers surely reach Her.

Our Mother is always dear and close to us. With love and trust we can take liberties with Her and confide in Her freely, for She is ever full of understanding and forgiveness.

CHINESE WISDOM

from the Inner Book of Chuang-Tze

THE TAO

They who search for and find the Tao are strong in their limbs, sincere and far-reaching in their thinking, acute in their hearing, and clear in their seeing. They exercise their minds without being toiled; they respond to everything aright without regard to place or circumstance. Without this, heaven would not be high, nor earth broad; the sun and moon would not move, and nothing would flourish: such is the operation of the Tao. The most extensive knowledge does not necessarily know It; reasoning will not make men wise in It; the sages have decided against both these methods. However you try to add to It, It admits of no increase; however you try to take from It, It admits of no diminution. This is what the sages maintain about It. How deep It is, like the sea! How grand It is, beginning again when It has come to an end! If It carried along and sustained all things without being overburdened or weary, that would be like the way of the superior man, merely an external operation; when all things go to It, and find their dependence in It: this is the true character of the Tao.

To take the root from which things spring as the essential part, and things as its coarse embodiment; to see deficiency in accumulation; and in the solitude of one's individuality to dwell with the spirit-like and intelligent — such a course belonged to the Tao of antiquity.

The sagely man has the bodily form of man, but not the passions and desires of other men. He has the form of man, and therefore he is a man. Being without the passions and desires of men, their approvings and disapprovings are not to be found in him. How insignificant and small is the body by which he belongs to humanity! How grand and great is he in the unique perfection of his heavenly nature!

Sages in dealing with others do not wound them; and they who do not wound others cannot be wounded by them. Only he whom others do not injure is able to welcome and meet men.

This master is a sage. Death and life are great considerations, but they could work no change in him. Though heaven and earth were to be overturned and fall, they would occasion him no loss. His judgement is fixed regarding that in which there is no element of falsehood; and, while other things change, he changes not.

The perfect man has no thought of self; the spirit-like man, none of merit; the sagely-minded man, none of fame.

Outside the limits of the world of men, the sage occupies his thoughts, but does not discuss about anything; inside those limits, he occupies his thoughts, but does not discuss about anything; inside those limits, he occupies his thoughts, but does not pass any judgments. The sage cherishes his views in his own breast, while men generally state theirs argumentatively, to show them to others. Hence we have the saying, "Disputation is a proof of not seeing clearly."

The perfect man is spirit-like. Great lakes might be boiling about him, and he would not feel their heat; the Ho and the Han might be frozen up, and he would not feel the cold; the hurrying thunderbolts might split the mountains, and the wind shake the ocean, without being able to make him afraid. Neither death nor life makes any change in him, and how much less should the considerations of advantage and injury do so!

Not to be separate from his primal source constitutes what we call the heavenly man; not to be separate from the essential nature thereof constitutes what we call the spirit-like man; not to be separate from its real truth constitutes what we call the perfect man.

To him who does not dwell in himself the forms of things show themselves as they are. His movement is like that of water; his stillness is like that of a mirror; his response is like that of the echo. His tenuity makes him seem to be disappearing altogether; he is still as a clear lake, harmonious in his association with others, and he counts gain as loss. He does not take precedence of others, but follows them. He knows his white purity, but keeps his disgrace — becoming the valley of the world. Men all prefer to be first; he alone chooses to be last, saying, "I will receive the offscourings of the world!" Men all choose fulness; he alone chooses emptiness. He does not store, and therefore he has a superabundance; he looks solitary, but has a multitude around him.

MAYA

There is the great awaking, after which we shall know that this life was a great dream. All the

while, the stupid think they are awake, and with nice discrimination insist on their knowledge, now playing the part of rulers, and now of grooms. They and you are both dreaming. I who say that you are dreaming am dreaming myself.

Formerly, I Chuang Chau, dreamt that I was a butterfly, a butterfly flying about, feeling that it was enjoying itself. I did not know that it was Chau. I did not know whether it had formerly been Chau dreaming that he was a butterfly, or it was now a butterfly dreaming that it was Chau.

Of all the waters under heaven there are none so great as the sea. A myriad streams flow into it without ceasing, and yet it is not filled; and afterward it discharges them also without ceasing, and yet it is not emptied. In spring and in autumn it undergoes no change; it takes no notice of floods or of drought; and that I have never, notwithstanding this, made much of myself, is because I compare my own bodily form with the greatness of heaven and earth. Between heaven and earth I am but as a small stone or a small tree on a great hill. So long as I see myself to be thus small, how should I make much of myself? I estimate all within the four seas, compared with the space between heaven and earth, to be not so large as that occupied by a pile of stones in a large marsh. I estimate our Middle States, compared with the space between the four seas, to be smaller than a single little grain of rice in a great granary! When we would set forth the number of things in existence, we speak of them as myriads; and man is only one of them. Men occupy all the nine provinces; but of

all whose life is maintained by grain-food, wherever boats and carriages reach, men form only one portion. Thus, compared with the myriads of things, they are not equal to a single fine hair on the body of a horse.

The Penumbra asked the shadow, saying, "Formerly you were walking on, and now you have stopped; formerly you were sitting, and now you have risen up: How is it that you are so without stability?" The shadow replied, "I wait for the movements of something else to do, and that something else on which I wait, waits further on another to do as it does. How should I know why I do one thing, or do not do another?"

There was a man who was frightened at his shadow and disliked to see his footsteps, so that he ran to escape from them. But the more frequently he lifted his feet, the more numerous his footprints were; and however fast he ran, his shadow did not leave him. He thought he was going too slow, and ran on with all his speed without stopping, till his strength was exhausted and he died. He did not know that, if he had stayed in a shady place, his shadow would have disappeared, and that if he had remained still, he would have lost his footprints.

KNOWLEDGE AND FAME

There should not be the practice of what is good with any thought of the fame which it will bring, nor of what is evil with any approximation to the punishment which it will incur.

Words are like the waves acted on by the wind; the real point of the matters discussed by them is lost.

The knowledge that stops at what it does not know is the greatest. Who knows the argument that needs no words, and the way that is not to be trodden?

The snow-goose does not bathe every day to make itself white, nor the crow blacken itself every day to make itself black. The natural simplicity of their black and white does not afford any ground for controversy; and the fame and praise which men like to contemplate do not make them greater than they naturally are.

I have turned my heart into a boat:
I have searched in every sea:
I have dwelt by rivers and streams:
I have bathed at places of pilgrimage:
I have lived in forests and glades:
I have eaten bitter and sweet:
I have seen remotest regions:
Yea: I have beheld heavens upon heavens:
And this have I learnt
That he is true to his faith
Who loveth God and man
And, serving all, abideth in the Good!

—*Song of Guru Nanak*

Cease not to think of the Universe as one living Being, possessed of a single Substance and a single Soul; and how all things trace back to its single sentience; and how it does all things by a single impulse; and how all existing things are joint causes of all things that come into existence; and how intertwined in the fabric is the thread and how closely woven the web. —*Marcus Aurelius*

TRIBUTE TO MOTHER

Charuprava Guhathakurta, generally known as Mother, and endearingly called Didu (grandmother), answered the Divine call before sunrise on Wednesday, September the fourteenth. Her liberation was somewhat a surprise because only the day before, the doctor had expressed satisfaction at the improved condition of her heart and had approved the plan of her return to India early this winter where her family eagerly awaited the reunion.

Born in 1885, married at the age of eleven, according to the social custom of the day and her country, having borne eighteen children and retaining almost perfect health through her life, this lady of unparalleled dimensions of soul came to the Vedanta Centre in Boston, Mass., at the age of sixty-five on Thanksgiving day of 1949. At the time, her knowledge of English extended slightly beyond the alphabet. But she learned rapidly because of the extraordinary agility of her mind. However, most frequently, she sat quietly, smiling and observing all that went on about her. Communication with her was always easy, because even in silence, everyone invariably sensed in her the gentle unmistakable mother-love, and understood that language which is spoken without tongue.

A "fountain of love" as one of her Indian foster sons called her, Mother returned a second time to us when Gayatri Devi paid her last visit to India in December, 1957. At the Ashrama's two communities in Cohasset and La Crescenta, she was a

constant source of support and inspiration. Her integrated life of self-discipline, her keen, quick humor and wise, yet child-like disposition, her utter flexibility of character under every circumstance, her joyous habit of singing, and, above all, her example of deepest religious devotion were a steady influence upon everyone who came to know her. Natural, always composed, enduring and overflowing with affection, this living embodiment of motherhood drew to herself more and more souls whose heart-hunger was appeased by her touch. Utterly unconscious of her own greatness, altogether too humble and modest to give instructions, she gave to one and all the essence of her being — bounteous love.

During the nine weeks of her physical indisposition the Ashrama community, especially the young sisters, poured out their devotion to her in tireless service. Mother was troubled having to receive so much, as her nature was independent and self-sufficient. She had always been the giver. And now, everyone considered it his privilege to serve her. Her bedroom became a focal center, a veritable shrine wherein the devotees met to commune with her and her Lord of whom she spoke more and more in eager anticipation of her union with Him.

Inately a devotee of God, Mother had reached a state of fulfillment which she expressed over and over in words of gratitude. Her life had been crowned with Divine grace and love and she longed to lay it down at His feet. Her death was symbolic of her life of total dedication. She gave up the

mortal form in the twinkling of an eye without any struggle or pain. Her body was found prostrate on the floor, head touching the altar on which stood holy pictures, her arms outstretched in an attitude of complete surrender. She who had been constantly surrounded by people was alone at the end. It was as if in the quiet of the morning, her Lord had come to take her home saying: "Now let us go while all are asleep."

On Friday morning, September sixteenth, Homa, India's ancient religious rital, the fire sacrifice preceded the memorial service held under the oak tree in the Temple patio. Bees and humming birds came to gather nectar from the many floral offerings that surrounded her mortal remains while other birds sang, mingling their notes with the reading of the Gita, words spoken in loving tribute, and the Vedic Hymn of Immortality, the Sanskrit supplication to Siva — the great transformer.

In Calcutta, thirteen days after Mother's passing, her four sons performed the Shraddha ceremony following Hindu religious and social custom. That same evening her family and many relatives and friends gathered to participate in a prayer meeting.

Letters of tribute and admiration have come pouring in from India, Europe and all parts of America. These eventually will form a book in her memory. Among these is the following from Cohasset:

"She will live eternally as Holy Mother in our hearts. Her life was a living example of unselfish devotion to God through service to all His children. May God give us strength to follow her example. Love."

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Beginning in July, Sunday services were held in Cohasset. The 4th of July was a highlight among events. It commemorated Swami Vivekananda's great liberation and was made significant by the observance of three hours of silence by the entire group.

Due to a sudden call from the Ashrama in California, Sri Mata Gayatri Devi left Cohasset on two hours notice, July 14 and returned August 3. In her absence the Sunday services and Wednesday classes in the Boston Chapel were ably conducted by Sister Snehalata Devi.

The thirty-first anniversary of the founding of Ananda Ashrama in Cohasset was marked on Sunday, August 14 by enthusiastic festivities. Gayatri Devi spoke at the eleven o'clock service on "Gift of Peace," and a Hindu dinner was served afterwards. At the four o'clock service, which was held in the new Temple of the Universal Spirit, Rev. McBride Panton, the minister and head of the Church of Spiritual Philosophy in St. Petersburg, Florida, spoke eloquently on the boon which the Ashrama bestows on all who find access into its heart of peace.

September 9 found Gayatri Devi in California again.

The autumn feast of Durga Puja began on September 27 continuing until the 29th when a special service was held before a happy gathering. The observance of Deepali, or the Festival of Lights on October 20, was another occasion for festivity and worship, attended by many.